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Animism, Ritual, and Landscape: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Maghi Puja among the Birhor of Purulia

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Abstract

This paper explores Maghi Puja of Birhors as an expression of animism through and ethnoarchaeological lense. Focusing on Birhor settlements of Bhupatipally, the study examines how the spiritual beliefs of Bonga shaped ritual practices, subsistence behaviors and human- environment relationship. Deriving from classical theories of animism by E. B. Tylor and the Man- Nature- spirit framework of L. P. Vidyarthi, this paper analyzes Maghi puja as a integrated ritual of ecological understanding and social organization. The ethnographic study expresses that ritual practices include offerings, spatial organization and limitation in hunting, all of which reflect on a reciprocal connection with the forest landscape. From the ethnoarchaeological stand point, their behavior generates material patterns- landscape use, faunal remains and repeaded site use- may provide interpretation of ancient context. Using the methodological overview of Binford, the study emphasizes cautions analogy, focusing on behavioral processes rather than direct historical continuity. This paper argues that animism functions as a both belief system and an ecological ethics, offering significant into sustainable practices and contributing to the broader discussion on indigenous knowledge systems and archaeological interpretations.

Keywords: *Birhor Community, Maghi Puja, Animism, Ethnoarchaeology, Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Man–Nature–Spirit Complex.*

Introduction

The Birhor community, whose name is derived from the Mundari languages where *'Bir'* means Jungle or forest, *'Hor'* means man, which collectively imply them- 'The jangle man' , who are living in forest (Roy, 1921). The Birhor's settlements are spreaded across the Chotonagpur plateau, especially the highland covered by forest which stretched from Chattrisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal from west to east. Traditional recognized as a hunting gathering community as eastern India, in West Bengal the Birhors are also identify and entitled as 'Shikari' which denotes hunter. Traditionally the Birhors are having two type of subgroup according to their settlement behaviors- the two are *'Jaghi'*, who have settle in specific regions and *'Uthlu'* who were traditionally nomadic hunter. But they have been rehabillated by the Government (act) from 1970s (Ota & Sahoo, 2010; Bandyopadhyay, S. 2015). Despite various external changing forces different Government rules regulation and resettlement Initiatives the Birhor continue of their unique hunting gathering elements and identity, continuing strong bond and dependency to their ancestral forest and traditional practices.

The study on contemporary hunter gatherer community depict a significant path to understand prolonged human- nature relationship, belief system religious practices and subsistence strategies (Binford, 1980).

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Among these hunter gather, the Birhor of Chotonagpur plateau of eastern India represents one of the few surviving food foragers whose traditional lifestyle continues to be closely tied to forests, natural elements and foraging economy.

The major spiritual practices centered around two major festivals (Pandey & Raha 2015, Karmakar, 2023) - the Shikar festival which celebrated during *Baisakh Purnima (*the full mood of first summer month) when the forest are clearly visible and spirits are helps in successful hunting. This is a hunting ritual that honours their ancestral livelihood as hunter gathers invoking blessing for a successful hunting with other their neighbouring community. The *'Maghi puja'* on the other hand, is a nature centric festival dedicated to spiritual essence of forest, rivers and hills at the ending of winter, reinforcing deep ecological Connections. *Maghi puja* celebrated during the month of *Magh* (Bengali 2nd month of winter) in one of the main ritual in the Birhor religious calendar. This is not only a seasonal ritual but also a complex of socio-religious practice which showcase the cosmology of the community depending of ecological knowledge, continuing and collective identity. The communal participation in offering the spirits and symbolic acts reaffirm the bond between ecology and human, nature and supernatural belief.

In that sense the *Maghi puja* can be a representation of animism a composite belief System (Roy, 1921), where natural elements- forests, animals, hills, waterfall, rivers landscapes are perceived not only as living entities with spiritual essence but also guard and protecting force in the forest Centered life .This abstract spiritual behaviour is actived by guide regulate man-nature interaction in relation to hunting, natural resources and environmental stewardship.

Animism in anthropology first systematically articulated by E. B. Tylor (1871). He reflected on 'Primitive culture' which emphasized on the idea of early human societies- attributed life and spirit in terms of natural phenomena. Early arguments framed the animism are most earliest and primitive state of cultural evolution. Recent anthropological understanding contrasted it as a sophisticated way of understanding human - environment relationship. Scholars after this like Philippe Descola (2012) has reflect on the animistic ontologies in the human and non-human existence with in shared correlational framework rather than as separate aspect. In Indian context L.P.Vidyathi (1963) introduced the concept of the Man-Nature spirit complex, highlighting the interconnection and interdependent relationship between ecosystems, human, society and spiritual belief among the tribal communities.

This paper will discuss about '*Maghi Puja'* within these broader theoretical Perspectives and seeks to analyze it through the lens ethnoarchaeology. Ending decades of 20th Century as Lewis Binford (1980) propose a new pathway to understand prehistoric behaviour through observe the living communities to generate reconstruction model. This model emphasis not only direct analogies between past and present. Bridging together anthropological theories, ethnographic observation and archaeological relevance the '*Maghi puja*' is the representation of system of knowledge in the sense of belief environment and subsistence. The festival depict broader image embodiment sustainable ecological principle through indigenous practices and strengthen the connection between past and present human behaviours.

Methodology

This study includes a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology, which interweave ethnographic observation with an ethnoarchaeological framework of analysis *Maghi Puja* as a representation of animistic belief system in the Birhor community. The research is primarily descriptive and interpretive in nature, focusing on the understanding of ritualistic behavior and its cultural context rather than testing predefined hypotheses. As ethnoarchaeology explores the relationship between observed practices with their potential material culture evidence, scholars like Lewis Binford, who employed the study of human- nature behavior

over direct analogy between present and past societies. The field context highlights on Birhor- inhabited regions, especially in Purulia where both ethnographic and archaeological relevance intersect.

The primary data for this research is driven from ethnographic fieldwork among the Birhor community through interview, observation, informal interaction and visual documentation. Observation and small interactions started from the day of preparatory phases of *Maghi puja* allows for a detailed study of ritual sequences, spatial organization, and patterns of participation. Observation and interactions also focus on process of selection and preparation of ritual and how offerings are distributed to the *Bonga*, relationship and contribution community members and also other non Birhor community members. Interview and informal interactions provide insight about community viewpoint and essence of ritualistic practice, enabling in incorporation of an emic perspective that portray indigenous worldviews of the ritual and environment. Ethical clearance from institution and participant consent has been taken before conducting the study

Secondary sources like monograph, journal, and various website are also used for the study for research gap identification and theoretical understanding. The analytical framework includes ethnographic understanding with theoretical aspects of animism and ecological relationship. Scholars E. B. Tylor, Phillpe Discola, L. P. vidyarthi and Lewis binfords are applied for interpretation cultural and environmental dimensions of the religious practices especially the interconnectedness of nature, human and spiritual forces. This case of Birhor animistic practice may provide a window to reconstruct the human behavior with past times with help of their continuing practice of *Maghi puja.*

Research question

This study enables to explore how the Birhor traditional religions practice contributes in animistic practices and interconnection with natural resources, also offer a broader relm of ethnoarchaeology of man-nature relationships in past days.

Universe of the study

The universe of the study included settlements of Birhor of Bhupatipally, located within the Ayodya uplands, green covered landscape of Purulia. This region is the eastern extension of the Chotonagpur plateau and is characterized by dry deciduous forests, undulating rugged terrain and patches of tribal settlements. Bhupatipally, under Baghmundi block of Purulia district represents an important site where the hunting and gathering Birhor communities still continuing the practice elements of their traditional livlihood including animistic rituals like nature, ancestral worship and *Maghi Puja*. The selection of this area is based on its continuing culture, ecological framework, and proximity to prehistoric archaeological zones of Ayodhya upland, providing a window for ethnoarchaeological investigations. The study highlights on the religious and spiritual practices, examining their interactions with the surrounding environment, patterns of ritual practice, and associated material behavior. This bounded natural geographical and cultural setting provides a focused framework for studying the interconnection between animism, subsistence and archaeological interpretations.

Ethnographic Background

The Birhors are identified as Particularly Vulnarable Tribal groups (PVTGs) of eastern India across Chotonagpur plateau majorly distribute Jharkhand Oridisha Chattisgarh and west Bengal (Bandyopadhyay, S. 2015). In West Bengal the Birhors are found in the Purulia District especially the green upland of western part. Traditionally Birhors are one of the semi nomadic hunter gatherer community, they maintain a close and dynamic dependency with forest ecology. The forest is not only for livelihood or habitat, forest become their culture identity among the other community of the regions with deeply embed in environment with every part of their life. Traditionally they resides in the forests and green valleys in the rugged terrier in a groups like bands, which is called as *Tanda*, made leaf made conical house*, Kumbha* (Bandyopadhyay, S. 2015).

Traditionally they are depending on food foraging activity including hunting gathering small scale fishing along with extraction of forest based materials (Roy, 1921). In the hunting they use various kinds of nets and traps. Beside hunting, their another district livelihood is rope making previously by plant fiber-called *Chihor /Siali* creeper, fibers and recent days plastic fibers with their unique rope making pattern. These surviving strategies demonstrate their adaptation in the jungle with changing time with a refined ecological knowledge and economical sustainability

The Birhors are majorly organized themselves small, co- operative communal group with their strong 'we' feeling, division of labour and shared responsibility. Hunting and gathering is mainly representation of collective activity involving. Every ages and genders from children, adults and old person may participate which also reflect division of labour and intergenerational knowledge transmission of ecological understanding and survival strategy .This interconnectedness among the all community members a social system based more on cooperation structured skilled based and participation then rigid hierarchy (Bandyopadhyay, S. 2015). Spiritual belief in religious practice is believing on *'Bonga'* or spiritual entity in the natural elements like forests hill water body and animals (Roy, 1921). As they also have their own version of Ramayana have portray the continuity of culture identity from past.

Maghi puja

This *Maghi puja* is communal festival to offer natural resource for their survival and protections. The Birhors are majorly worship natural elements not only for their economic security but also as a central part of their daily life. In their folklore one of the old woman narrated that king of Lanka Ravan appoints Birhors to catch and kill the lineage of monkey .Once at the time of work of Ram Ramayana. Thats why from that time they are still catching the monkey from centuries. Even they believe that Monkey has fear the Birhors, once monkey come across any Birhor, they do regards and escape as soon as possible.

The *Maghi puja* is cultural identity of the Birhors. In every year they celebrate the *Maghi Puja* their sacred place near the periphery of jungle or sacred place of their settlement especially any wooden or tree's sheds whole year they take care and respect .This area locally called *'Jaher Than'* with boundary.

Author experienced and participated the *Maghi puja* last year with their invitation to observe this puja in the winter. In *Maghi Puja* where hunting practices are minimal and most of community or *Tanda* members are in their place. They also invite all the community Birhor other neighbouring community member to celebrate this *Maghi Puja* from different villages. This become the central part of the festival beyond the spiritual ceremonial practices to the communal union with feast and rhythm.

The *Maghi puja* has three stages firstly, preparatory phase puja phase communal feast, which started from a week back of the puja day. A week before the Maghi puja '*Naya'* asked his assistant *'Garat" /Gortika'* to call every adult male family member to discuss and decide about the date and time about Maghi puja .They used to gather in the courtyard of '*Naya'* and discussed about their availability of the family member and decide the date time this discussion also included the enlist of puja essential and family wise contribution after these discussion they started cut the bushes of their sacred area with the help of sickle and knifes for clearing the weeds. Then they started preparing the floor by washing the floor and wipe out with cow dung mix water to make a layer as purify the area. On the day of puja in morning they gathered in a common ground. In the gathering they collected monitory contribution where every family represented some money or contribute in other essentials of puja .They made a list which they have to collect from home of the community member and which will be brought from the market. They enlisted the essentials not only for ritual but also for communal feast .This discussion decided that how many goat or hens will be sacrificed for offering in the rituals.

One of the group members said that- *"Aji Maghi puja Ayodhya thakur er name amra pujo debo.Murgi utusorgo korbo .Pujo dewar Por murgi ranna korbo. .Mangso or bhat khabo.Atiya kutumboder nimontron korba."*

English- Today is Maghi puja, we will worship *Ayodhya Thakur*, offer hens to them .After that we will eat chicken and rice. We will invite the relatives.

After preparation and every things arranged the *Naya* come with the male members of his family and his assistant for puja after taking bath and wear white piece of cloth some of them. Before starting then light up fires with the dry branches of trees one person was looking after the fire, so that it could off by wind lack of wood. The person continuously put wood pieces and control the fire and some of them help the *Naya* for making the temporary sacrifice stand *"Hari Kat"* by straw and bamboo. They set the small length two bamboo in the floor with the support of straw, bamboos are flat, long and tie with Chihor fiber made rope make a shaped frame where animal neck will be placed at the time of sacrifice Then one of the member made roles of tobacco leaves with chapping tobacco make local cigarette which will be consuming by the older members and Naya after the completion of ritual. Some of the community members brings all their hunting weapons, nets and traps near the puja place.

Then every sacrificed animals and birds carried out by the group member. Then Naya starts, the puja with lighting up the incense sticks. As women or female members are not allowed. In the puja another observe puja ritual from the distance and could not take any photograph. They called older community members for their guidance in the time of worship and offering. From the ancestral times belief the spirits of both benevolent and malevolent equally worship by them especially female spirits. Some malevolent spirits are Birbhut who half circle figure and Dasha who is symbolizes as angular setup of bamboo on the floor.

The spirits are regarded as *'Sipahi'*/guard of the place along with the natural elements -Hill, uplands, river-ponds, waterfalls where ever they roam for hunting gathering ancestral spirits of the community member s are also worship goats and cocks are dedicated and sacrificed to the spirit. After applying oil and vermilion to dedicate ancestral spirits, hens called as *Kutam* which is killed by hitting the head with the backside of one.

In their hymes which means in bengali *"Lagubaba megh megh poacheelo. Bochor ses*

tomake dichchi.Amara jeno sokolei valo thaki.

Ban-jongole,pahar,porboti

shikar jeno vàlo hoì Gram-

gunj sob kichu jeno thik- thak thake'."

English: Lagubaba clouds of Magh month has reached we are offering

You the ending of year so that we can be happy

We can do good hunting…

and offerings they also include various place of their settlements and ancestral place namely - Dakai, Mohultand Ichahatu Barelia, Chikonbagan, Kudnh Bongbong Dera, Bukadi, Bhupati pally, Sonkupi,Pateri ,Dhoska, chirugar,Barta joduadin, Perahata Bandhdin, Budadi, Basukccha, Janahar Sapasmora, Barchatu, Nahei duiri, Gada, kaeya Bir, Desh Chowreshi, Nandhdin, Budadi And Etc, And also animals name Baghbir, Bhakulbir, Honumanbir, Bandaribir.

For *Buru bonga* or spirits the *Naya* offers a cock by left hand in the name of *'Ulfagari'* so that there will be no misfortune in their daily livings. Next they dedicate the worship called *"Guru Guruan"* Who are deities of medicinal plants ,then offering goes to "*Dinda* or *Sat Bahni* and the end the Worshiping offered in the name of *Jungni* .So that no Sad, disease or other accident do not enter their Settlement some people Also call this deities *Nimcha.*

With this hymes and ritual the utter the names of these natural element- hill, river, waterfalls, and forests are following (Karmakar, 2023)-

Table 1: Names of natural element and their area/location

Natural elements	Area/ Location
Luguburu	Hazaribag
Zingaburu	Hazaribag
Pareshnath	Hazaribag
Dolma buru	Jharkhand
Halodboni	Jharkhand
Chutiaburu	Jharkhand
Gargariya thakur	Jharkhand
Kukuburu	Sonkupi area of Baghmundi
Mathaburu	Matha area of Baghmundi
Uldah	Waterfall of Matha area of Baghmundi
Murara buru/ Chekiya buru	Srirampur also known as Pakhi Pahar area of Baghmundi
Anrgar	Dhoska village of Baghmundi
Shirish Dah	Waterfall near Dhoska village of Baghmundi
Bindah Hatah	Waterfall near Dhoska village of Baghmundi
Marang Charri	Patdih area of Baghmundi
Huding Charri	Patdih area of Baghmundi
Shirgi Buru	Shirgi- Bersa area of Balarampur
Tilgara	Ghatbera area of Balarampur
Borgara	Ghatbera area of Balarampur
Shalni	Ghatbera area of Balarampur
Lukui chatani	Ghatbera area of Balarampur
Dham chatani	Ghatbera area of Balarampur
Bhuda	Upland of Shirkabad of Arsha
Patbhuda	Upland of Shirkabad of Arsha
Pat charri	Saprambera- area of Ayodhya
Sukariburu	Saharjuri, area Ayodhya
Kula Panja	Before Saharjuri, area Ayodhya
Goyalikocha	After Saharjuri, area Ayodhya
Matkomburu	Dakai area of Jhalda-1
Naoa Garh Patma	Dakai area of Jhalda-1
Gaja Asra	Bukadi hills near Baghmundi
Chent buru	Burda area of Baghmundi
Borora buru	Near Kayrabera
Nachni Akhra	Bareria area of Baghmundi
Labdah	Barara area of Baghmundi

Kuhuk buru	Baredih area of Baghmundi
Kashiburu	Baredih area of Baghmundi
Puridhiri	Kudna area of Baghmundi, near Daori waterland
Bidhu Kocha	Kudna- Sukurdova
Pordah	Kudna- Sukurdova
Bura Kaoyer	Kudna- Sukurdova
Kanre Buru	near Tikortand area of Baghmundi
Jura buru	near Poporkocha Dam area of Baghmundi

In their hymes and offerings they also include various place of their settlements and ancestral place namely - Dakai, Mohultand, Ichahatu Barelia Chikonbagan, Kudnh Bongbong Dera, Bukadi, Bhupati pally, Sonkupi, Pateri, Dhoska, Chirugar, Barta Joduadin, Perahata, Bandhdin, Budadi, Basukccha, Janahar, Sapasmora, Barchatu, Nahei duiri ,Gada, kaeya Bir,Desh Chowreshi, Nandhdin ,Budadi And Etc, And also animals name Baghbir, Bhakulbir, Honumanbir, Bandaribir.

For Burubanga or spirits the Naya offers a cock by left hand in the name of 'Ulfagari' so that there will be no misfortune in their daily livings. Next they dedicate the worship called "Guru Guruan "Who are deities of medicinal plants ,then offering goes to "Dinda or Sat Bahni and the end the Worshiping offered in the name of Ingni .So that no Sad, disease or other accident do not enter their Settlement some people Also call this deities Nimcha.

In their belief most of the misfortune, illness or accidents even today, can be caused by supernatural force likely either by spirits hovering in earth, water, hills forests and other natural elements or by lesser powers or energies in various animate beings and also inanimate objects. The daily life problem and their solutions arrived to seek establishment of permanent and long term relation through rites and sacrifices, to drive off, control or to avoid the spirits by various rites and rituals, magical spell, totems and taboo, rules and regulations to secure good luck and and avoid misfortune to healthy life, progeny and food security.

They call this process as Bongo *Uthana*. Thus whole life if Birhors is pervaded by religion. Repeated failure, sudden accident or sickness of community members denotes the dissatisfaction or lose control of lesser order spirits, they have to please sacrifice and promise to sacrifice. For the higher order spirits, if they get angry for not to get periodical sacrifices or taste of blood, to satisfy their premature craving, denoted by sickness and death to the community members.

Birhors believe that Singa Bonga (Sun God), supreme deity who control the huge arena of the struggle of man and spirits, who look after everything- food, health and strength of life.

Deities and spirits worshipped in the Maghi Puja

In the time of scarcity of the animals or delay of sacrificing rituals they try to do arrange by borrowing from others otherwise they have to postpone the date for limited time otherwise any person get sick, missing of community member and bad luck at the time of hunting. As now a days for forest rules, regulations and biodiversity loss sometimes they don't engage hunting for long time so they have to suffer by the spirits and deities become increase day by day.

The religious worldview of the Birhor community is deeply rooted in wor nature, animism, ancestral reverence and the belief in supernatural spirits who control their survival and social harmony. Their deities are commonly referred as Bonga, as associated with environment elements- hills, forests, rivers, animals , ancestors and daily life welfare. Religious practice used to to in the cluster of forest near their settlements when they majorly lead their life as nomadic humter gatherers, now these place after rehabilitation and

resettlement at the border of forest they have identified a sacred place in their settlements called Bongathaan and thaan, under the guidance of Naya the village and religious head of the community. With the help of sacrifices, offerings, vermilion marks, rice, tobacco, liquor, and wild flowers they use to worship their deities and spirits.

Singa Bonga

The one of the supreme and most powerful deities of birhord is Singa bonga. Whenever they individually or family face difficulties like severe illness, misfortunes and economic crisis. In that time at the Bongathaan the Naya worship Singa Bonga in the name of the sufferer and do the rituals very carefully in the early morning. This rituals preys to protection, healing and overall well- beings.

They have certain natural objects used in the worship like bamboo sticks and Chihor/ Shaal stems marked with vermilion. They offer sirni rice, arwa rice, vermillion powder, sweets, incense sticks, wild grass, incense sticks or resins and sacrifice animal. Usually they sacrifice one white hen and one goat. They one of the distinctive offerings is their rice liquor. Along with the Singa Bonga, animal deities like Hanumanbir (monkey deity) and Ora Bonga may also worshiped. When Singh Bonga is invoked, Luguburu/ Lugu maharaja is often remembered simultaneously.

Luguburu

Luguburu means the spirits of buru or the spirits of the hills, who is the most respected deities. The deity is connected to their ancient Hill known as Lugu Pahar, traditionally this located in the deep forests near Jharkhand. They worships the deity to seek protection from diseases and maintain good health.

At the Bongathaan the worship is organized under the supervision of Naya. Branches os small steams of Shaal tree *(Shorea robusta*) with the mark of the sacred symbol with vermilion. Mist of the ritual material is similar of all worship along with the liquor. One goat and two hens are considered as sacrificed animals and birds for offering. In Birhors certain religious practitioners possess the spiritual presence of Luguburu within their bodies. Some practitioners are also believed to worship Sidha Bara along with the Lugu Buru.

Buri Mai/ Devi Mai

She is respected as the mother earth and the consort of Lugu Buru. She is the deity of fertility, protection, prosperity, security and nurturing power of nature. She used to worship by Birhors for good health, successful hunting, security of woman and the welfare of the household. Along with the basic ingredients of Worshipping the sacrifice consists of three goat- one black, one white and one round shaped. Balak Mai and Chirak Mai are considered as the daughters and Kapsa as son of Debi Mai, are also worshipped together,remarking the significance of divine family in the Birhor cosmology.

They believe that if she get angry for not doing or forgetting to worship will elope the girls or women of the community in the forest, as soon as they do the rituals the women are founded but they will lose their recent memory.

Sidha Bara

He is also considered as protective deity also worshipped for the collective well-being and prosperity of family members. The ritual for this deity starts in the early morning in a clandestine way as bomga would get any if outside of family see the rituals. Along with the general rituals materials two goats- one charaka(white goat), one black with one her are sacrificed for this deity. The worship emphasizes unity of family member, protection from evil forces and maintenance of domestic peace.

Animal and Jungle deities

Along with the major deitys the Birhors also believed in the presence of spirits in several animals which reflect the close linkage between forest ecosystems and hunting traditions. These are as follows

Bagh bir- Tiger

Hundar bir- Wolf deity

Bir Banhy- forest ape spirit

Bander Bir- Monkey deity

Hanuman bir- Ape god

These animals are collectively related with hunting success, courage, protection and security of forest and survival the forests. Special offerings include white goat for successful hunting and secure life for any animal attack.

Clan Deity

Birhors family have their own clan and that regarding clan deities are worshipped at the common sacred place. Relatives under same clan jointly participated together to worship dedicated to their ancestral spirits for the protection from illness and representation of collective harmony within the kins and clan members.

This offerings of the rituals are rice and money kerp in a ritual basket, which are keep in the forest.

Ora Bonga

He is the most significant and powerful deities of Birhor religious beliefs. He is worshipped annually among the closely related family members for family welfare and protection from misfortune. A miniature ritual hut are made like their traditional house patter called Kumbha. The ceremony sacrifices of goats and hen, in the presence of close family members inside the house over several days and night. For some specific season they worship also occur at shrines or thaan of the family.

Heprom: Ancestral spirits

Ancestral worship is one of major part of Birhor belief system, they are called as Heprom. In their cosmology the Birhor Heprom is the guide or saviour in difficult situations. Memorial ceremony and at the time of pollution period after death of any family member. Sacrifice and Remembrance are the major practice to include the deceased souls into the family's family spiritual world and continues to protect and secure descendants from any bad luck.

Burhi Heprom and Chowrasi Heprom are one of the examples of Heprom who are representing recently recently died relatives and older ancestral generations.

Female and Malignant spirits

In the Birhor community cosmology presence of harmful or restless spirits who majorly cause illness infertility,conflict or psychological problems. Those are-

Sangi bhut- related with possession during festivals and rituals dancing

Nasan bhut- sprits attack women after husband's death

Churin and Kichin- women who died during pregnancy and child birth respectively

To control them they perform appeasement rituals with rice lamps, hen sacrifice, vermilion and Spiritual chant performed by the Naya. With time the Birhor get rehabilitated and increase contact of Hindus and Christians, they got influenced by them and start participant in their festivals and rituals. Through Maghi puja and Shikar Utsab they are continuing their tradition and rituals deeply connected with animism, nature spiritually and ancestor worship, exhibits their enduring cultural relationships with nature and supernatural world.

Post Puja activity

After ending of the offerings and this ritual, they made a mix sweets, dry flattened rice and drink- *Handia* the spread by essentials. They mix oil and vermillion in leaf made cup then made marks on the animal and birds, and fed the animals and birds as last food. They did their main worship by chanting and offered to the forest and Spirits of nature then. Their hymes *'Bakher'* then the take names of every natural elements of the nearby forest hills and other environmental elements. The older aged took names according their use in hunting they believe that of any element missed it will become make a misfortune or accident at the time of hunting. They offered every element *Atap chal*(rice), *sindur* (vermilion) sacrificed the Birds and animal for each hills, rivers, waterfall forest with their hymes. Then the other community member repeated every offering each and every hills forest and rivers. After that few community member who have some promise to any spirits or deities for their guidance protection and recovery for any accident or praying for good luck. After fulfilling their wise or recovery they come with hens or other animal to sacrifice and satisfy the deities so that the deity or elements will not be angry and make.

At ending the ritual they offer *Hanria* as an auspicious drink with each hills rivers forest and other elements. After that they first distributed the Prasad - flattend rice, sweet and hanria among the older members then Youngers and at last women and children. Then the prasad and hanria distribution was over the collect every head cut sacrificed animal and birds for clearing and cutting, then prepare for the communal feast. They have their rule that everybody come in the place of puja and take their part but cook and eat together. They could not allow to take the sacrificed animal or bird's part to home as it is offer for forest spirits so they prepare the food and eat at their sacred places.

The preparation of communal feast started with making temporary heater near the sacred place then they bring utensil and other ingredients for cooking. Firstly the remove the fur or feathers of the sacrificed animals and Birds with a crude razor which is made of blade hafting in dry thin and small branches, then they remove the skin carefully for future use.

After that they chopped every body part of sacrificed animal and birds then they spreaded a plastic mat and gather every part and start distributing among all the community member family wise .They chopped small pieces. There 72 people contributed as the family representative, then they also gave some portion of their invitees as honours but they also restrict that their Non Birhor guest also ate at the place itself. After the distribution they started cooking together and enjoy.

According to the community member- "*Ajke mangsho bhat khabo ar Nacha-gana korbo.Saradin nacs gana kore furtite katabo. Age pahar varti chilo jangale.*

Ekhan thikadar ra sob jangal kete dhangsho korlo.

Paher er jantu- jonowar, pakhi sob ses hoe gelo'

English- Today we will eat meat and rice do dancing and singing and will enjoy this whole day in past hills were covered by forest. Now contractors cut down forest and destroy animals and birds.

In the afternoon they tried to wrap up by 4 pm as especially before sunset. They prepared food together .their some people engage in cooking, some people helped them and some people dance with thin traditional musical instruments and share their hunting experience super natural and spiritual power of Natural elements.

Discussion

The interconnection between animism and ethnoarchaeological perspective of *Maghi puja* could be comprehended with the help of belief into religious practices, and practice into tangible outcomes. The interconnection between animism and ethnoarchaeological perspective of *Maghi puja* could be comprehended with the help of belief into religious practices, and practice into tangible outcomes. Animistic worldview of the Birhor is not merely a religion ideology but a living reality where natural elements- hill, water bodies, forests, animals and green landscapes are the homage of spiritual entities known as Bonga. The classical theory of animism introduced by E. B Tylor (1871), which described that the belief of spiritual entity or souls; later on various scholars has expanded the understanding into a relational system of human- nature interactions. In the Indian context the concept of Bongaism introduced by scholarship like DN Majumdar, who emphasizes on the *Bonga* or spirits in the structuring indigenous cosmology and everyday life (Majumdar, 1950). For the Birhor worldview, the spirits are not the distant deities but the active forces to control over hunting and gathering, health, ecological understanding and wellbeing of whole community, with this embedding spirituality directly linked into subsistence practices (Singha & Murmu 2020; Shukla, 2011).

The Maghi Puja showcases a key ritual moment where the animistic worldview is practiced and made socio-cultural identity. The ritual includes offering for the deities and spirits, communal participation and engagement with forest landscapes, reflecting what Vidyarthi conceptualized as the "Man- nature- Spirit" complex explained with the worldview of *Maler* tribe of eastern India (Vidyarthi 1963). From the centuries back the monograph of Birhors by SC Roy and recent ethnographic studies highlighted that Birhor's ritual practices are deeply embedded with the indigenous knowledge systems, where ecological understanding, moral and spiritual values are transmitted through their daily life or occasional religious practices (Das & Rai, 2025; Mathew, 2023). Along with the ritualistic behavior ancestral veneration and remembrance practices described by Mathew (2023, 2024) explained how memory, spirituality and landscape are interweaved, reinforcing continuity in cultural identity even the various socio- economic changes. Ahmed also interprets the spirituality of Birhors remark as a synthesis of Karma Marge and Bhakti Marge, suggesting that ritual practice is both devotion and action oriented, further deepening its socio- ethical dimension.

The significance of *Maghi puja* in the dimension of ethnoarchaeology rely on its capacity to translate belief into observable behavior and also into material evidences. Spirituality and ritualistic activities includes the various steps of *Maghi puja* such as sacred place, use of fire, use of natural elements, cooking, feast and deposition of offerings for years after years as one of the oldest indigenous communities developed a pattern of human and nature behavior that may leave archaeological signature with their age old cosmology. Material culture- woods, leaves, fibers and other associated to rituals and livelihood along with the repeated use of same location sacred place and forest landscape regarded as material of *Maghi puja* and their hunting gathering can result in the identifiable site formation patterns. This aligns with the methodological approach introduced by Lewis Binford, he emphasized on the understanding of the relationship between behavior and material remains over the direct analogy.

The ethnographic study support the behavior-material interlinked. Studies by Mathew (2021, 2023) and Imam (2016) reflect on how the spiritual life of the Birhors is integrated with mobility, use of landscape and collective memory, all of which provide to patterns interaction with space. Singha and Murmu (2020) explain that Birhors socio- cultural practices including hunting gathering livelihood and ritual gathering, are framed around ecological rhythms and community participation, reinforcing both communal cohesion, environmental

ethics and awareness. This pattern are significant in ethnoarchaeological interpretation, especially regions of Purulia, where the prehistoric antiquity are discovered and suggested repeated occupation and activity.

Simultaneously Animism also operates as an ecological understanding and ethics that regulates behaviors. Rituals like Maghi puja often coincides with the periods of decreasing hunting and limiting resources use, thereby contributing to sustainability. As mentioned by Singha and Murmu (2020) the independence of ecology, economy, and religious beliefs in tribal societies ensures that resources use is governed by cultural values rather than exploitation. This aspect is supported by recent studies which argues that Birhor spirituality plays a significant role in traditional value education and environmental stewardship (Das & Rai 2025). In this way Animistic worldview is not only a belief system but also a pragmatic approach for maintaining ecological balance.

This approach is an important approach with these insights with caution. Binford suggested that ethnographic findings and observations cannot be directly projected onto the past; instead, they should be used to generate models of interpretation. In present days Birhor livelihood and spiritual practices are shaped by historical and socio-economic changes and therefore cannot be treated as exact analogous of prehistoric man behavior. Nevertheless, the observations provide important insights into how cosmology and belief system can structure behavior and how this behavior may reflected in the archaeological antiquities of human.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study on Maghi puja illustrate that Animism and ethnoarchaeology are deeply interconnected. Animism provides the ideological blueprint which structured human interaction with the nature, while ethnoarchaeology provides the methodological path to understand how these interactions leave material and behavioral traces. Together, they enable a more holistic understanding to human- nature relationship, interlinked the gap between past and present the enduring relevance of the indigenous knowledge systems.

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